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Situation of women and girls with disabilities and the Status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 70/145, provides an overview of the situation of women and girls with disabilities and presents the ongoing efforts and progress made by Governments, the entities of the United Nations system and civil society organizations in advancing the rights and status of women and girls with disabilities. The report also provides an update on the status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto. It concludes with recommendations for the further inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in the implementation of the Convention and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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I. Introduction

1. Article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes that women and girls with disabilities face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination In the preamble to the Convention attention is drawn to the particular susceptibility of women and girls with disabilities to violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation. Mindful of these particular challenges, the General Assembly, in its resolution 70/145, requested the Secretary-General to submit, at its seventy-second session, a report on the situation of women and girls with disabilities, including a segment on the status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto (see annex). In the same resolution, the Assembly also acknowledged the contributions of other international frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, towards the fulfilment and mainstreaming of the rights of persons with disabilities and emphasized the importance of mainstreaming disability issues as an integral part of relevant sustainable development strategies.

2. Pursuant to resolution 70/145, the present report provides an overview of the situation of women and girls with disabilities, in line with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and with a view to the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It provides an outlines the international norms and standards that guide national efforts to advance the status of women and girl, and of persons with disabilities, noting the strengths and weaknesses of these frameworks in ensuring that attention is paid to the specific challenges of women and girls with disabilities. With regard to the intersecting priorities of the frameworks, the report draws on the research available to explore briefly the situation of women and girls with disabilities in the areas of inclusion and accessibility, education, decent work, employment and social protection, the right to sexual and reproductive health, violence against women and girls with disabilities, and data and statistics. Based on inputs from Member States, United Nations entities and civil society organizations,[1] the report also provides insights into the initiatives and activities being undertaken to address the specific needs of women and girls with disabilities in these key areas, at national and international levels, as well as general efforts to ensure the full participation and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities as agents of development. The report concludes with recommendations for action for the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in the implementation of the Convention and of the 2030 Agenda.

[1] In response to a note verbale sent by the Secretariat, inputs were received from 30 Member States: Australia, Burundi, Cambodia, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Czechia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Greece, Jordan, Kenya, Lithuania, Mexico, Mongolia, Qatar, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Spain, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and United States of America; nine United Nations entities: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) and the World Health Organization (WHO); and nine civil society organizations: Everyday Psych Victims Project, International Disability Alliance, Making It Work, Recovery Experts by Experience, Researchers Philanthropy, Sightsavers, Latin American Network of Non-Governmental Organizations of Persons With Disabilities and their Families (RIADIS), World Blind Union, Zero Project.

II. International norms and standards relating to women and girls with disabilities

3. The advancement of the status of women and persons with disabilities is rooted in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and supported by several international instruments, norms and standards on human rights, development, disability, gender and, more recently, peace and security. Relevant instruments include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

4. The particular needs and roles of women with disabilities were addressed explicitly by the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, adopted in 1982, which recognized women with disabilities as a special group and addressed the specific barriers they face in accessing health care, education and employment. The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the General Assembly in 1993, also called for particular attention to be paid to women in achieving equality of opportunity for persons with disabilities. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, also identified specific actions that Governments should take to ensure the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities in various areas, bringing disability inclusion into the general efforts to address the multiple barriers to empowerment and advancement faced by women and girls. Building on those previous commitments, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognized the multiple forms of discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities, committing States parties to taking measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

5. Other regional and international frameworks have also acknowledged the importance of including women and girls with disabilities in both the drafting and implementation processes.

6. At the regional level, the European Union signed the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (2014) in 2017, in which the parties are urged to take measures to protect the rights of victims, including persons with disabilities. In 2012, Governments in the Asia and Pacific region adopted the Ministerial Declaration on the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022, and the Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for persons with disabilities, with one of the 10 goals dedicated to ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment. The Organization of American States adopted the Program of Action for the Decade of the Americas for the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities (2006-2016), which includes specific references to women and girls with disabilities, in line with the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities.

7. At the international level, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 emphasizes the importance of disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction, calling for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the design and implementation of policies, plans and standards on disaster risk reduction, and for promoting the leadership of women and youth in the process.

8. The international community has also addressed the urgency of inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in humanitarian action. The commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 included the achievement of gender equality, the empowerment of women and girls, and disability inclusion in humanitarian action. The Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (2016), endorsed by Member States, United Nations agencies and a number of human rights networks and organizations, made specific reference to women and girls with disabilities and called for their empowerment and protection from physical, sexual and other forms of violence in the context of humanitarian emergencies.

9. In addition, Member States made references to women and girls with disabilities in international agreements concerning countries facing specific challenges, referred to as the most vulnerable countries, in pursuit of sustainable development.[2] While most outcome documents on countries in special situations address gender equality and women's empowerment, the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 makes specific references to access to water and sanitation services and the equal rights of women with disabilities. In the Small Island Developing States Accelerated Modalities of Action Pathway (2014), recognizing the multiplier effect on sustainable development of women's empowerment and the full realization of human rights for women and girls, the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States highlighted the importance of tackling the structural and socioeconomic inequalities and multiple intersecting forms of discrimination that affect women and girls, including those with disabilities, that hinder progress and development. Commitments to women and girls with disabilities in the Pathway included support to providing high-quality education and training and disaggregation of data by sex, age and disability.

10. Many international and regional norms focus only on persons with disabilities, implicitly covering women and girls with disabilities but without recognizing the specific challenges faced by them. For example, in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, adopted in 2015, the participants committed to providing social protection and access to education, employment and technologies for persons with disabilities. The New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016, pledges to eliminate discrimination, provide equal access to technology, employment and public services, including transport infrastructure, for persons with disabilities, and ensure their participation in decision-making processes in urban planning.

11. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the international community also made an implicit commitment to the empowerment and advancement of women and girls with disabilities. On the principle of "leaving no one behind", the 2030 Agenda explicitly recognizes gender equality and disability as cross-cutting issues. In addition to a stand-alone goal to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Sustainable Development Goal 5), the 2030 Agenda requires the systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in its implementation. While disability is not addressed in a stand-alone goal, it is specifically included in the Goals related to education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, and data, monitoring and accountability. In addition, persons with disabilities are recognized among those vulnerable groups for whom progress must be particularly monitored, as Member States aim to achieve universal goals concerning basic needs, including the

[2] See General Assembly resolution 70/1, para. 22.

eradication of poverty and hunger, ensuring healthy lives and well-being, and securing access to clean water and sanitation for all.

12. The international frameworks outlined in the present report all provide exceptional opportunities to advance the situation of women and girls with disabilities.

III. Situation of women and girls with disabilities

13. The prevalence of disabilities among women is higher than in men. While only 12 per cent of men have a disability, for women that is estimated at 19 per cent.[3] As of 2015, women and girls with disabilities were expected to reach 700 million globally.[4] The higher rate among women is partially attributable to a mix of factors, including women's longer life expectancy, the later onset of dementia[5] and the impact of poor maternal health care, particularly in developing countries.[6] The relationship between old age and the prevalence of women with disabilities is a critical factor, given the current global trend of ageing populations and the fact that the population of women in the older age group outnumbers men in all regions, constituting 54 per cent of those aged 60 and over and 62 per cent of those aged 80 and over in 2015.[5]

Inclusion and accessibility

14. Equal access to social welfare, education and employment are fundamental for the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities, their participation in decision-making processes and leadership roles in society and development. However, the multiple forms of discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities continue to pose a challenge to their full inclusion in society. Women and girls with disabilities have limited access to education, employment, adequate housing and health care (see A/70/297, para. 38). They also face denial of political, economic and social rights owing to persistent cultural, legal, physical and institutional barriers. They are also likely to be excluded or neglected in policy and decision-making processes. Accessibility is a precondition for full and effective participation of persons with disabilities.[7] For women and girls with disabilities, accessibility plays a pivotal role in seizing an opportunity to access basic services, including food, water and sanitation, health care, education, transport and information. In that regard, information and communications technology is an essential tool for creating enabling conditions for women and girls with disabilities.

Education

15. Girls with disabilities are less likely to complete primary school and more likely to be marginalized or denied access to education. Only 41.7 per cent of girls with disabilities complete primary school, compared to 50.6 per cent of men and boys with disabilities and 52.9 per cent of women and girls without disabilities.[3] Likewise, women and girls with disabilities receive on average 4.98 years of

[3] WHO and World Bank, *World Report on Disability* (Geneva, WHO, 2011), 28.

[4] Estimate based on two reports: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "World population prospects: 2017 revision", in which it is estimated that the global female population is approximately 3.6 billion, and *The World Report on Disability*.

[5] See United Nations Statistics Division, *The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics* (New York, 2015).

[6] See Lori Ashford, "Hidden suffering: disabilities from pregnancy and childbirth in less developed countries", Population Reference Bureau, 2002.

[7] See General Assembly resolution 48/96 and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, art. 9.

education, compared to 5.96 years for men and boys with disabilities and 6.26 years for women and girls without disabilities.[3] Educational disadvantage among women and girls with disabilities could lead to higher risk of social exclusion and poverty and could have long-term implications for their capacity and opportunity to participate in labour markets.

Decent work, employment and social protection

16. Women with disabilities have a 19.6 per cent employment rate, compared with 52.8 per cent for men with disabilities and 29.9 per cent for women without disabilities.[8] Many women and girls with disabilities engage in domestic activities that typically do not generate monetary incomes and are therefore at considerably higher risk of living in poverty. This relegation to the domestic sphere is often linked to stigma associated with disability.[9]

17. Women with disabilities often experience inequality at workplaces as regards hiring and promotion standards and access to training and retraining. For those women with disabilities who pursue self-employment, the lack of access to credit and other productive resources, has remained a common challenge.[10]

18. Social assistance benefits can have positive effects on employment for persons with disabilities.[3] However, in 2016 only 28 per cent of women and men with severe disabilities collected disability benefits.[11]

Right to sexual and reproductive health

19. At the global level, particularly in developing regions, the leading causes of death amongst women are HIV/AIDS and maternal conditions.[5] Women with disabilities of reproductive age (15-49) are at higher risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes than women without disabilities.[12] However, as a result of inaccessibility and stereotyping, women and girls with disabilities are persistently confronted with barriers to sexual and reproductive health services and to information on comprehensive sex education, particularly women and girls with intellectual disabilities.[13]

20. Women with disabilities are also likely to have negative health indicators, such as mental distress, obesity and asthma, and have less emotional support compared to women without disabilities.[12]

Violence against women and girls with disabilities

21. Globally, women are more likely to experience physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence than men, and women and girls with disabilities experience

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[8] Figures based on an analysis of World Health Survey results from 51 countries, see *World Report on Disability*.

[9] See UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2013: Children with Disabilities* (New York, UNICEF, 2013).

[10] See Arthur O'Reilly, "The Right to decent work of persons with disabilities", International Labour Organization skills working paper No. 14, 2003.

[11] See E/2017/66 and indicator 1.3.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals, available from https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/?indicator=1.3.1.

[12] See M. Mitra and others, "Disparities in adverse preconception risk factors between women with and without disabilities," *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, vol. 20, No. 3 (March 2016).

[13] See Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNFPA and Wellesley Centers for Women, *Disability Rights, Gender, and Development: a Resource Tool for Action* (New York, UNFPA, 2008) and Carolyn Frohmader and Stephanie Ortoleva, "The sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls with disabilities," briefing paper for the ICPD Beyond 2014: International Conference on Human Rights (2013).

gender-based violence at disproportionately higher rates and in unique forms owing to discrimination and stigma based on both gender and disability.[14] For instance, women and girls with disabilities experience domestic violence at twice the rate of other women and they also experience forms of violence specifically because of their disability, including isolation, violence in institutions and the withholding of medication and mobility, vision and hearing aids.[15] In particular, women and girls with disabilities are more likely to be subjected to forced medical treatment and reproductive health procedures without their consent.[16]

22. The threat of violence is particularly high in conflict areas. Women and girls constitute almost half the global refugee population and are at high risk of various forms of violence and exploitation, such as sexual abuse, forced impregnation, forced abortion and trafficking.[5] Owing to the inaccessibility of refugee camps, women with disabilities are often confined to their shelters and their voices go unheard in reconciliation activities.[16]

Data and statistics

23. Data disaggregation by disability, sex, and age is indispensable for understanding the situation of women and girls with disabilities and informing policies to ensure their social inclusion and human rights. However, such data remains scarce. An increasing number of countries are collecting data on persons with disability, however the data are often not disaggregated by sex and age. Lack of reliable and high-quality data is a major obstacle impeding greater progress in policies and programmes for women and girls with disabilities. Moreover, data collected on persons with disabilities by countries are not always comparable owing to the use of different methodologies for collection.[17] For many of the Sustainable Development Goal indicators of relevance for women and girls with disabilities, no internationally established methodology or standards are yet available, thus preventing the collection and availability of data. For example, that is the case for indicator 11.7.2, which measures physical and sexual harassment by sex and disability.

IV. Initiatives and activities undertaken in advancing the rights and status of women and girls with disabilities

A. Member States

24. Initiatives and activities of Member States for the empowerment and advancement of women and girls with disabilities have been concentrated in the areas of legislative frameworks; partnerships, cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination; and addressing issues of accessibility, social protection, habilitation and rehabilitation, education, work and employment, health care, the right to sexual and reproductive health, violence, and data and statistics. The present section summarizes the inputs received from Member States in that regard.

[14] See UNFPA, *Addressing Violence against Women and Girls in Sexual and Reproductive Services: a Review of Knowledge Assets* (New York, UNFPA, 2010) and Stephanie Ortoleva and Hope Lewis, *Forgotten Sisters — a Report on Violence against Women and Disabilities: an Overview of its Nature, Scope, Causes and Consequences*, Northeastern University School of Law Research Paper No. 104-2012 (2012).

[15] Stephanie Ortoleva and Hope Lewis, *Forgotten Sisters — a Report on Violence against Women and Disabilities*.

[16] See Carolyn Frohmader and Stephanie Ortoleva, "The sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls with disabilities".

[17] UN-Women issue brief, "Making the SDGs count for women and girls with disabilities" (2017).

Legislative frameworks

25. Many Member States reported the formulation of laws and regulations to promote and protect the rights of women and girls with disabilities. Since 2009, Cambodia has developed the Law on the Protection and the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, while the Ministry of Women's Affairs has conducted awareness-raising workshops on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, particularly women and girls, and training on mainstreaming gender and disability into policy development. The law in Jordan stipulated that the Higher Council for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities should form a committee to serve as an advisory and implementing body on all issues relating to women with disabilities. China passed a Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women (1992, amended in 2005), to ensure the completion of compulsory education for girls with disabilities and to prohibit the mistreatment or abandonment of women with disabilities. It also passed a Law on the Protection of Minors (1991) to protect women and persons with disabilities from being discriminated against or mistreated by their families. In Mongolia, the Law on Social Protection of Persons with Disabilities (2005) was revised in 2016. Also in 2016, Kenya passed the bill on persons with disabilities. Turkey established a Disability Act (2005) which incorporates measures to combat discrimination and gender equality.

26. Some Member States have reported that they guarantee the protection of the rights of women and girls with disabilities through anti-discrimination laws. In Switzerland, the Equality for the Disabled Act stipulates that the Confederation and the cantons must take account of the specific needs of women with disabilities, including the elimination of double discrimination. Under the Constitution in Qatar, all Qataris are considered equal in their rights and obligations, and persons with disabilities receive the same services as non-disabled citizens without any discrimination.

National action plans and programmes

27. A significant number of Member States reported the integration of women and girls with disabilities into their national plans and strategies focused on disability, with many of them in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Australia, Cambodia, Chile, Costa Rica, Czechia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Kenya, Lithuania, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Togo and Tunisia have developed national strategies and action plans on persons with disabilities, with the provision of rights, inclusion and equal opportunities and access for women and girls with disabilities, taking into account the risk of multiple forms of discrimination.

28. Some Member States reported on the progress in their national strategies for women and girls with disabilities. Ecuador and Senegal are taking specific measures to advance gender equality, through the national agenda for equality of disabilities 2018-2022 in Ecuador and the national disability action plan 2017-2021 in Senegal. Mongolia is currently developing a national programme on protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, including women and girls with disabilities, and supported the participation and engagement of persons with disabilities to accelerate the implementation of the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In the Philippines, the National Council on Disability Affairs develops policies, plans and programmes that address the concerns of women with disabilities. Chile, Cyprus, El Salvador, Greece and Jordan reported on their efforts to promote rights, equal treatment and the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities through their national strategies and actions on gender equality.

29. Czechia, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are promoting the rights and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities and encouraging their participation in society and development through national human rights development strategies and plans. Czechia included provisions on the multiple forms of discrimination faced by women with disabilities in its national plan. In Saudi Arabia, the 10th development plan, 2015-2019, contains a number of objectives and policies aimed at the promotion and protection of human rights, including the rights of women and girls with disabilities. The United Arab Emirates has developed an association for the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities, which was launched in 2011 with the aim of empowering women with disabilities through capacity-building of girls with disabilities.

Accessibility

30. Accessibility, including improving access to information, services, facilities and the built environment, has continued to be a key priority for many Member States in the context of addressing the concerns of women and girls with disabilities. Mexico and Saudi Arabia reported on their work dedicated to improving the accessibility of public spaces and transportation systems for persons with disabilities. Romania also reported on a series of measures taken, with special attention paid to women and girls with disabilities, to increase the access of persons with disabilities to all community facilities and public resources, including social welfare benefits and services.

Social protection

31. Member States recognize the rights of women and girls with disabilities to social protection and have reported on their efforts to improve social protection, in line with the commitment of the 2030 Agenda to leaving no one behind. Australia reported on the national disability insurance scheme, which is delivered in a gender-neutral and sensitive manner. Saudi Arabia and Senegal also reported on their efforts to incorporate the perspectives of children and women in their social welfare programmes targeting persons with disabilities. Ecuador, Mongolia and the Philippines implemented a series of social programmes aimed at promoting the autonomy of persons with disabilities and their reintegration into families, with a focus on women and girls with disabilities.

Habilitation and rehabilitation

32. Several Member States reported on the measures taken to enable women and girls with disabilities to attain and maintain maximum independence through rehabilitation services and programmes. China adopted a regulation on disability prevention and rehabilitation for persons with disabilities in 2017, which provided a legal basis for the development of rehabilitation programmes for persons with disabilities, including women and girls with disabilities. Lithuania is implementing its action plan for 2016-2018, which focuses on the funding of projects on rehabilitation services in the community, projects on independent living and mobility skills training for persons with disabilities and other programmes dedicated to mainstreaming persons with disabilities in society. Senegal also reported on the implementation of a national community-based rehabilitation programme for persons with disabilities. In Saudi Arabia, persons with disabilities have the option of living in rehabilitation housing centres or living with their families, with grants given to their parents/guardians for the provision of care.

Education

33. Member States are making efforts to secure equal opportunities for education for girls with disabilities. China, Peru and Tunisia reported progress in strengthening laws and regulations pertaining to inclusive education, while supporting special education as needed. Burundi reported on its continued efforts to promote inclusive education for children with disabilities, including girls. Mongolia highlighted the implementation of its programme on the equal enrolment in school of children with disabilities (2014-2018), which has contributed to an increase in the investment in technology, equipment and school supplies for improving learning environments and promoting positive attitudes toward persons with disabilities. Kenya reported on its programme for the education of girls with disabilities. Ecuador also reported on its efforts to address sexual violence and the abuse of women and girls with disabilities in educational institutions.

Work and employment

34. A number of Member States reported on their actions to encourage persons with disabilities, especially women with disabilities, to participate in the labour markets. Greece reported on a domestic law that promotes the principle of equal treatment and combating discrimination in employment on grounds of disability, age or sexual orientation. Australia, China, Mongolia and Peru have continued the government programmes that support persons with disabilities in employment. Qatar reported on coordination between government agencies and the private sector to increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through provision of the necessary training.

35. Recognizing the multiple forms of discrimination that women and girls with disabilities face, Costa Rica has included an action in its strategy for the promotion of labour inclusion of persons with disabilities (2016-2021) to promote affirmative action for women with disabilities in training and employment. Peru reported on its efforts to strengthen the utilization of telework, a telecommunication tool that enables the provision of services without the physical presence of the workers, which provides women with mobility disabilities with a suitable mechanism for entering the labour market.

36. Member States also reported on an increase in government funding for the economic empowerment of women and girls with disabilities. In Kenya, 10 per cent of the Government Procurement Opportunities Fund is set aside specifically for women with disabilities. Togo also reported that nearly 500 women with disabilities and mothers of children with disabilities had received microcredits from the contribution of the national funds on inclusive finance and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Right to sexual and reproductive health

37. Member States recognized that women and girls with disabilities experience a higher prevalence of violations of the right to sexual and reproductive health, which exacerbates their health risks. Chile and Costa Rica reported on interministerial cooperation to eliminate the gender gap and promote the right to sexual and reproductive health of women and girls with disabilities. Ecuador participated, as one of the pilot countries, in the global programme for sexual and reproductive health and the prevention of gender-based violence among youth and adolescents with disabilities, entitled "We decide", launched by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Senegal is developing a national strategy for universal health coverage that includes mechanisms to promote the reproductive health of women with disabilities.

Violence against women and girls with disabilities

38. Several Member States reported on their national plans and specific initiatives to address the heightened risk of the exposure to violence and exploitation of women and girls with disabilities. In Australia, the national plan to reduce violence against women and children (2010-2022) identifies, supports and responds to women with disabilities who are experiencing, or are at risk of domestic violence and sexual assault. Burundi, Czechia, Peru and Turkey also reported on their respective national plans that are responsive to victims of abuse and violence, with specific attention paid to persons with disabilities.

39. El Salvador reported on an initiative devoted to the prevention of violence against women and to restorative measures for survivors of violence. Turkey also noted the special needs of women and girls with disabilities, especially those with mental disabilities, in the context of the delivery of medical and forensic treatment, trauma support and consultancy for the victims of sexual violence. In Spain and the United States of America, government grants are awarded to programmes designed to address abuse and violence against women and girls with disabilities.

Data and statistics

40. Data disaggregated by disability and disability-specific indicators are indispensable in analysis, monitoring and evaluation of the situation of women and girls with disabilities in economic and social development, and are critical to evidence-based policy-making at regional, national and local levels. Several Member States, including Chile, China and Mexico, reported on their continued efforts to tackle the dearth of information and statistics in relation to women and girls with disabilities. The United States reported on the national surveys conducted by the Census Bureau that include data on women with disabilities, including their age, type and severity of disability, race, ethnicity and economic and employment status. Australia highlighted a survey of disability, ageing and carers, which provides a demographic and socioeconomic profile of people with disabilities, carers and older people, providing policymakers and practitioners with an authoritative data source for disability-specific analysis and indicator reporting. The Dominican Republic and Jordan reported on their ongoing initiatives in improving national censuses and surveys with the adoption of the set of disability questions developed by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics.

Partnerships, cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination

41. Recognizing the cross-sectional nature of the challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities in both society and development, many Member States reported recent improvements in coordination and collaboration across government agencies and public institutions. Cambodia, Chile and Jordan have taken concerted measures to mainstream gender and disability into policy development and implementation. Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and the Philippines reported on their efforts in policy coordination and cooperation between offices concerned with gender equality and disability, to take initiatives for improving the well-being of women and girls with disabilities.

42. International cooperation is of vital importance in supporting national efforts for the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities, including for women and girls with disabilities. Through adoption of the strategy, "Development for All 2015-2020", Australia strengthened its commitment to work with its partner governments to improve their national censuses and administrative data set, and data collection on the situation of women and girls with disabilities. In Romania, the National Agency for the Equality of Women and Men, in partnership with the National

Agency for Disabled Persons and the NGO "Active Watch", initiated a project entitled "Justice has no gender", funded by the European Commission, to support national information, awareness-raising and education activities to prevent and combat violence against women. In Turkey, the General Directorate of Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly carried out a project from 2013 to 2016 on support for the implementation and monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in cooperation with UNDP, to increase awareness of the Convention and establish indicators for monitoring the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of national human rights monitoring.

43. The examples outlined in this section show that Member States continue to put effort into advancing the empowerment of women and girls with disabilities and realization of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, some Member States expressed concern that the lack of data, limited capacity to conduct monitoring and evaluation and inadequate financial resources constituted major obstacles impeding their efforts to further advance the rights of women and girls with disabilities in society and development. Jordan reported on the challenge of developing comprehensive data, disaggregated by sex, specifically in relation to women and girls with disabilities. Senegal noted that there was insufficient training for administrators and senior officials of the Government on disability issues and that owing to inadequate financial resources for disability management programmes, the lack of disaggregated statistical data on women with disabilities and the weak partnerships for the promotion of the rights of women with disabilities, it faced major challenges in advancing the status of women and girls with disabilities.

B. United Nations system

44. The United Nations system continues to strengthen coordination and collaboration, to support the development and implementation of international, regional and national initiatives to advance the rights, perspectives and leadership of women and girls with disabilities, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mainstreaming the issue of women and girls with disabilities in the work of the United Nations

45. As the focal point on disability for the United Nations system, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs continues to mainstream gender and disability as an integral part of its work in support for and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other international commitments.[18] In recent years, the Department, in collaboration with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and other relevant entities, has organized a number of events and panel discussions to build a unique policy space for women and girls with disabilities in global programmes for the advancement of persons with disabilities.[19]

[18] See www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues/women-and-girls-with-disabilities.html.

[19] For example, a panel discussion entitled "Harnessing the power of women and girls with disabilities for inclusive society and development" at the tenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, held from 13 to 15 June 2017 in New York; a workshop on women and girls with disabilities at the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women, held from 13 to 24 March 2017 in New York; and the Expert Group meeting on advancing the rights and perspectives of women and girls with disabilities in development and society, held from 15 to 17 November 2016 in Santiago.

46. Since its establishment, UN-Women has worked in close collaboration with other United Nations entities and offices on advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women in all aspects of the international agenda. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UN-Women continue to work closely to advance the rights and leadership of women and girls with disabilities through intergovernmental processes, including the General Assembly, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission for Social Development, the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other relevant processes. In recent years, in conjunction with the Commission on the Status of Women, UN-Women has amplified the voices of women and girls with disabilities through engaging them at the Commission, including making specific reference to them in its strategic plan 2018-2021.[20]

47. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has issued guidelines on the inclusion of learners with disabilities in open and distance learning, reviewing in depth the technology-based approaches used to deliver education to women and men with disabilities. The World Health Organization (WHO) continues to work within the framework of its global disability action plan 2014-2021, in which the barriers faced by women and girls with disabilities are acknowledged through several initiatives.

48. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Volunteer programme have been engaging persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, to contribute their skills and talents in supporting their development, peace and humanitarian programming.[21] The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also supports the participation of women and girls with disabilities in implementing the global development agenda, including by amplifying their voices and promoting their rights and their access to justice and services.

Technical assistance and coordination within the United Nations system

49. Several United Nations entities have continued to provide technical assistance to Member States for the social inclusion, empowerment and leadership of women and girls with disabilities. UN-Women has supported a number of government initiatives in conducting studies or providing information on women and girls with disabilities to inform other policymaking processes.[22] The United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, and the Fund for Gender Equality give special consideration to programmes reaching marginalized populations, including women with disabilities. In its call for proposals this year, the Fund to End Violence against Women plans to open a special thematic window on violence against women and girls with disabilities. UNICEF is working to address the barriers that girls with disabilities face in their everyday life, with a focus on their access to water,

[20] See the agreed conclusions of the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women on women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work and of the sixtieth session on women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development. See also the UN-Women strategic plan, available from www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive-board/2017/second-regular-session-2017/unw-2017-6-strategic-plan-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3044.

[21] Women with disabilities are reported to work as UNV advocacy specialists on disability, UNV specialists for improving the rights of persons with disabilities and online volunteers.

[22] In Cabo Verde, Chile, Costa Rica, India, Uruguay and the Gaza Strip.

sanitation and hygiene, and to health information and services.[23] In consultation with Member States, United Nations entities, civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and other stakeholders, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights continues to provide technical advice to Member States on persons with disabilities from the perspective of human rights, including thematic studies in line with the articles in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.[24]

50. The United Nations system is strengthening current efforts to improve disability-specific indicators and their application in analysis, monitoring and evaluation, such as the WHO model disability survey and the UN-Women flagship programme initiative for better production and use of gender statistics for evidence-based localization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

51. Collaboration and coordination among United Nations entities continue to transform the existing "silo" approaches into a more coherent and cohesive inclusion of gender equality and disability through internal existing mechanisms, such as the Inter-Agency Support Group on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Partnership to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Gender perspectives have been successfully included in various United Nations disability-inclusive development agendas through such mechanisms, specifically in the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean co-organized an expert group to formulate a set of recommendations to support the operationalization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other internationally agreed development goals in a way that is inclusive of and responsive to the needs and perspectives of women and girls with disabilities. UNFPA, in collaboration with the secretariat of the Pacific Community, included protection of the rights of young people with disabilities, especially girls, in the formulation of the Pacific youth development framework 2014-2023, securing their specific needs, including access to sexual and reproductive health services.

52. The intersectionality of gender and disability with other factors, such as age, ethnicity and humanitarian crises, has also been addressed by UN-Women, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and UNFPA. For example, recognizing the specific difficulties faced by Palestine refugee women and girls with disabilities, UNRWA developed new technical standards and guidelines to ensure that its premises are physically accessible for persons with disabilities.

C. Civil society organizations

53. Significant progress has been made by civil society organizations in advancing the rights of women and girls with disabilities. There has also been broader and

[23] In Cambodia and Jordan, UNICEF has worked with government ministries to develop national water, sanitation and hygiene standards in schools that are both gender-sensitive and provide standards for accessibility for disabled persons, including guidance on hygiene management In the United Republic of Tanzania, UNICEF has supported the construction of school latrines that are both gender-sensitive and accessible to persons with disabilities. In Guinea-Bissau, UNICEF initiated an HIV prevention and peer counsellor training programme for girls and boys with hearing impairments and their teachers.

[24] Those themes include, but are not limited to, violence against women and girls with disabilities, participation in political and public life, the structure and role of national mechanisms, humanitarian emergencies, independence and inclusion in the community, education and work and employment.

more active participation of organizations of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes at the national, regional and international levels. For example, the tenth session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities welcomed many representatives from civil society, including women and girls with disabilities. Many organizations also reported on their partnerships with local governments in advocating the rights of women and girls with disabilities, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

54. Many civil society organizations are conducting awareness-raising activities and advancing policy research on the issues that specifically impact the lives of women and girls with disabilities. The International Disability Alliance, Making it Work and the World Blind Union, noted the challenges that women and girls with disabilities are faced with, including multiple forms of discrimination, gender-based violence and limited access to justice. Sightsavers reported on their inclusive employment and education programmes aimed at empowering women and girls with disabilities to access their rights. Sightsavers also highlighted their disability-inclusive disaster preparedness programme. The Zero Project reported on efforts made to ensure the rights of women and girls with disabilities to health information and services and to support their self-employment through microfinancing solutions and vocational training.

55. Several civil society organizations noted that the lack of reliable disaggregated data remains a major obstacle to the advancement of women and girls with disabilities.

V. Monitoring and evaluation for the advancement of the status of women and girls with disabilities

56. Lack of data and information on women and girls with disabilities hinders planning processes and the implementation of gender-responsive and disability-inclusive national strategies, policies and programmes.

57. While efforts have been made by Member States, the United Nations system and civil society, the collection of reliable data on women and girls with disabilities remains a challenge. Sustainable Development Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, which addressed many concerns of women and girls with disabilities, including the ending of all forms of discrimination and violence and access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, has provided significant opportunities for strengthening monitoring and evaluation for the advancement of the status of women and girls with disabilities. The Sustainable Development Goal indicators will help in the monitoring and evaluation of the progress made in implementation. The follow-up and review mechanisms of the Goals, including the high-level political forum on sustainable development, voluntary national reviews and the annual report on the Sustainable Development Goals will contribute to ensuring their implementation.

58. The generation of internationally comparable data requires the adoption of a unified method of data collection across all countries. No census or survey is complete until the data collected is made available to users in appropriate formats. In that regard, countries are encouraged to submit data in common reporting formats to the United Nations for further dissemination and to promote the use of existing disability statistics. That reporting will require significant capacity-building efforts at the national level, involving all stakeholders.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

59. **The rights of women and girls with disabilities are often addressed in the context of persons with disabilities and/or women and girls, without attention being paid to the specific multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women and girls with disabilities. In recent years, the specific rights, challenges and perspectives of women and girls with disabilities have been given heightened attention and the concept of inclusive development has been strengthened with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its commitment to leaving no one behind. Furthermore, partnerships and cross-sectoral approaches to promoting the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities have been enhanced. While many Member States have developed national strategies and plans on disability for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, stand-alone policies on women and girls with disabilities remain limited. Major challenges include data collection, national capacity and the mobilization of financial resources in promoting the rights of women and girls with disabilities.**

60. **In addition to the challenges posed by the lack of equal access to information, social services, education and economic, political, social and cultural participation, women and girls with disabilities are often invisible in national laws and policies and remain marginal to global discussions and agreements relevant to their empowerment and advancement.**

61. **The strengthening of the legal and policy frameworks for women and girls with disabilities should be highlighted at the global, regional and national levels. The priority areas to address include multiple forms of discrimination, gender-based violence, the right to sexual and reproductive health, and accessibility in public services and information. Effective coordination, networks and partnerships are crucial in mainstreaming women and girls with disabilities at all levels. Keys for successful implementation include disaggregated data based on disability, adequate financing and engaging women and girls with disabilities in the monitoring and evaluation process.**

62. **In that regard, Member States may wish to consider the following recommendations:**

(a) **Strengthen the normative and policy frameworks for equality and the full participation of women and girls with disabilities in society and development, including, inter alia, ending violence and all forms of discrimination against women and girls with disabilities;**

(b) **Promote the full and effective participation of women and girls with disabilities in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural spheres, and advance their empowerment and leadership roles at all levels of decision-making;**

(c) **Ensure equal opportunities and strengthen equal access to information, education, employment, financial services and health services, including sexual and reproductive health, and enhance accessibility in infrastructure, transportation and technologies, including information and communications technologies for women and girls with disabilities;**

(d) **Strengthen data collection and capacity-building to increase the availability of reliable data disaggregated by sex, age and disability for effective policy development, implementation and monitoring;**

(e) Advance coordination and accountability mechanisms to catalyse work for women and girls with disabilities and build partnerships and networks at the national, regional and global levels among, inter alia, Governments, United Nations entities, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations, including women's organizations and organizations of women and persons with disabilities, for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in line with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Annex

Status of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto

Since the previous report on the Status of the Convention and the Optional Protocol thereto (A/69/284), from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2017, there have been 23 additional ratifications,[a] 4 accessions[b] and 2 signatories[c] to the Convention, as well as 4 additional ratifications[d] and 5 accessions[e] to the Optional Protocol.

As of the date of submission of the present report, there were a total of 174 States parties and 160 signatories to the Convention since its opening for signature on 30 March 2007. The European Union, as a regional organization, has also ratified the Convention. There were 92 States parties and 92 signatories to the Optional Protocol. The list of all signatories, ratifications and accessions is available online from https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-15&chapter=4&clang=_en.

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[a] Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belarus, Brunei Darussalam, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, Finland, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Madagascar, Micronesia (Federated States of), Netherlands, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Viet Nam.

[b] Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gambia, Marshall Islands, Sao Tome and Principe.

[c] Belarus and Samoa.

[d] Central African Republic, Congo, Finland and Turkey.

[e] Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Gambia, New Zealand and Thailand.